Literacy for Life

Report on Partnerships for Children's Literacy

Ministry of Education
Ontario

LITERACY FOR LIFE

REPORT ON PARTNERSHIPS FOR CHILDREN'S LITERACY

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Family Literacy Interest Group

Ministry of Citizenship

Ministry of Colleges and Universities

Ministry of Community and Social Services

Ministry of Culture and Communications

Ministry of Education

Ministry of Health

Ministry of Industry, Trade and Technology

Ministry of Labour

Ministry of Skills Development

Office of Francophone Affairs

Ontario Federation of Labour

Ontario School Trustees' Council

Ontario Teachers' Federation

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Preface

The United Nations declared 1990 the International Year of Literacy. To celebrate this event, the Ontario Ministry of Education sponsored a series of meetings across the province on children's literacy. The main purpose of these meetings was to promote community partnerships for children's literacy among social agencies, community organizations, education, business, and labour. It was hoped that these meetings would provide an opportunity for an exchange of information on current literacy programs and encourage further action through the establishment of community literacy networks.

This report contains a summary of the ideas presented at this series of meetings as well as a listing of specific proposals for future action to support children's literacy development. A survey of existing programs is also included. The report is based on oral presentations and written submissions made at the meetings.

It should be emphasized that the opinions expressed in this report are those of the individuals who attended the meetings and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Ministry of Education. Similarly, the proposals listed in the report are presented as a means of clarifying issues and opportunities for action at the community, regional, and provincial levels. They do not constitute formal recommendations to the Ministry of Education or any other ministry of the Government of Ontario.

The Ministry of Education also sponsored a series of French-language children's literacy meetings. A French-language report has been published separately.

Introduction

In recognition of 1990 as the International Year of Literacy, the Ontario Ministry of Education sponsored a series of meetings on children's literacy which were held across the province from February 22 until May 31, 1990. Named "Partnerships for Children's Literacy", the project focused on community partnerships that currently exist, or that could be formed, to support literacy development in young children.

Project rationale and objectives

Partnerships for Children's Literacy was based on the following assumptions:

- Focusing on literacy in young children attacks the problem of illiteracy at its root and therefore offers the best hope of improving levels of literacy in our society.
- Home and community activities influence children's literacy growth to a significant degree and affect children's success in school.
- School-home-community partnerships can help to provide children with a sustained opportunity to develop reading and writing skills both in and out of school.

The project was launched to increase awareness of the importance of early influences on literacy development in children, and to encourage the involvement of community organizations in literacy programs for young children. It was intended that this series of meetings would act as a means to:

- improve understanding of the factors that enhance or impede literacy development;
- improve understanding of approaches to, and the role of the community in, literacy development in young children;

- disseminate information about literacy partnerships involving community organizations;
- facilitate new partnerships through networking among interested parties at the community level;
- provide information about current materials and resources.

Participating organizations

The Ministry of Education was assisted in the planning of this project by an advisory committee composed of representatives of a number of ministries and organizations. Represented were the Ministries of Citizenship, Colleges and Universities, Community and Social Services, Culture and Communications, Francophone Affairs, Health, Industry, Trade and Technology, Labour, and Skills Development, as well as the Ontario Federation of Labour, the Family Literacy Interest Group, the Ontario School Trustees' Council, and the Ontario Teachers' Federation.

Eighteen meetings were held in the six regions of the province (see Table 1). They were attended by over four hundred participants representing the following organizations:

- boards of education (participants included teachers, principals, consultants, and parents of school-age children)
- public libraries
- community health departments and health units
- social service agencies
- agencies working with new Canadians
- Native Friendship Centres and Native associations
- community literacy coalitions and councils
- family literacy organizations
- labour organizations
- community colleges and universities
- the Ministries of Community and Social Services, Culture and Communications, Education, and Health

Table 1

Locations and Dates of Literacy Meetings

Region	1990 Dates	Locations
Central	February 22	Barrie
	February 26	North York
	February 28	Guelph
	March 1	Cobourg
	March 2	Etobicoke
	March 5	St. Catharines
Western	March 6	Essex
	March 7	London
	March 8	Listowel
Northwestern	April 10	Kenora
	April 12	Thunder Bay
Northeastern	May 15	North Bay
	May 17	Timmins
Midnorthern	May 23	Sault Ste. Marie
	May 24	Sudbury
Eastern	May 29	Ottawa
	May 30	Ottawa
	May 31	Kingston

Format of the regional meetings

The format of the meetings was worked out in consultation with the regional education officers who hosted the meetings in their respective regions. Both whole-group and small-group activities were included.

The whole-group activities consisted of:

- presentations by the project facilitator, Donald Rutledge, on literacy development in young children and the effects of literacy on a person's intellectual and emotional development (see Section I, "The Roots of Literacy", pp. 7-13);
- reports by regional education officers on recent literacy initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Education;
- presentations (at most meetings) by selected participants who were invited to speak about the literacy programs in which they were involved.

For the small-group activities, participants formed discussion groups in order to share information about existing literacy programs in their communities and investigate the potential for establishing new literacy partnerships. Each discussion group included representatives of various agencies and organizations.

The following questions were offered as a guide for the small-group discussions:

- What circumstances in a child's life are important in fostering literacy?
- How can parents and the community contribute to literacy development?
- What literacy programs for children are currently available in your community or area?
- How could these programs be extended?
- What new literacy partnerships could be formed?

Each group was responsible for selecting a discussion leader and a reporter. The reporter summarized the main points of the group's discussion and presented its findings and proposals to the meeting. The findings and proposals of all the discussion groups were subsequently collated and they form the bulk of this report – see Section II, "Children's Literacy Partnerships: Ideas and Proposals", pp. 15-41; and Section III, "Survey of Existing Literacy Programs and Initiatives", pp. 43-58.

Participants' major concerns

Participants welcomed the opportunity to discuss their ideas and share information about children's literacy. They generated a great many specific proposals on a wide range of possibilities for future partnerships and programs. At the same time, as the project progressed, certain major concerns came to the fore, expressed by a number of participants at most, if not all, of the meetings. Participants were especially concerned about the lack of communications among literacy agencies; the extent of community involvement; the difficulties in reaching children at risk; the level of provincial support; and the need for communities to make their own decisions regarding literacy programs. The response of participants to these concerns can be summarized in the following broad propositions.

Better communications are needed among agencies involved in literacy programs. Lack of communication among literacy groups results in a fragmentation of literacy initiatives and inhibits the exchange of information and ideas. This, in turn, can lead to a duplication of efforts – individual agencies often have to "reinvent the wheel" when developing their literacy programs. These problems are compounded by the fact that there are many agencies working in this field, with no organization responsible for co-ordinating their activities.

Better communications among literacy groups could help to ensure more efficient program delivery. It could also lead to more effective use of resources through sharing arrangements, which would be of particular benefit to small communities and school boards that would otherwise have to work with limited resources and facilities.

In addition to forming closer links with one another, literacy agencies need to communicate with the public concerning the importance of literacy and the availability of programs to support it. Disseminating information on literacy activities is a necessary first step in encouraging community involvement.

The whole community should become involved in supporting literacy. There needs to be a community focus on literacy, fostered by liaisons among community institutions and agencies and backed by public awareness campaigns. Literacy must be seen as essential to the welfare of the community. To support this outlook, there could be more formal recognition of the contribution that can be made by the many community organizations (in addition to educational institutions) that have a stake in literacy development, such as public libraries, health and social service agencies, local businesses, service clubs, and cultural and religious groups. Programs could also be organized in such a way as to encourage the participation of parents and senior citizens as volunteers in community literacy activities.

At-risk children should be specifically targeted. A conscious effort must be made to reach those children whose literacy development is most at risk – for example, children of low-income and/or single-parent families, Native children, and children of recent immigrants whose language in the home is not English. Families of these children are often reluctant to participate in literacy activities because they feel stigmatized by their lack of literacy skills. Literacy programs should therefore be offered in a non-threatening atmosphere in which the whole family can share learning experiences. Families should also be given a say in both the development and the delivery of these programs.

There needs to be more provincial government support for family literacy programs. If community literacy agencies are to operate consistently over the long term, they need regular and predictable funding, much of which can come only from the provincial government. Agencies look to the province for more than just funding, however; they also need information on how to foster literacy acquisition and development, access to resources (both personnel and materials), and accurate, up-to-date information on the programs being provided by other agencies. Efficient delivery of information and services requires a co-ordinating function that can best be fulfilled at the provincial level.

Decisions regarding literacy initiatives should be made at the community level. The long-term success of literacy programs rests on commitment and leadership within the communities concerned. Although many literacy agencies rely on provincial support, they should not be restricted in their ability to respond to local needs and conditions in the way they consider most appropriate. The most successful programs are often those that are started on the initiative of small local groups.

Section I

The Roots of Literacy*

"Partnerships for Children's Literacy" is an appropriate title for this project in more than one way. Not only does it refer to the need for co-operative action on the part of government and community agencies, it also indicates an essential aspect of the process by which children learn to read. Learning to read involves a partnership between those who are learning and those who already know how. To begin with, this partnership is necessarily an unequal one, in which the learner needs continual support and encouragement. But as the learner acquires and develops literacy skills, the level of assistance can be gradually reduced until he or she attains full independence in dealing with the task at hand.

Reading and writing are not isolated functions, to be introduced and taught when children reach a suitable age. They are both inextricably linked with the acquisition of oral language.** Without a mastery of speech, we would lack the internal voice that automatically accompanies us as we read and that we instinctively use to clarify meaning and interpret nuances of tone. Similarly, writing involves an internal dialogue that helps us to sort out our ideas as we set them down on the page. Indeed, speech forms the indispensable basis of both these language activities; we could not become literate without it.

* This section is based on presentations given at the regional meetings by Donald Rutledge, the project facilitator.

** "Oral" language does not have to be spoken; it can be signed. For deaf children who learn American Sign Language (ASL) from their infancy onwards, signing fulfils the same role in literacy development as speech does for hearing children.

This means that the process whereby a child becomes literate does not begin when that child starts learning to read. The roots of literacy reach back much further, to the period in which the child is learning to speak, the most intensive learning occurring between the ages of twenty-two months and four years, although the process actually begins much earlier. The progress a child makes in mastering oral language can have a significant impact on that child's ability to learn to read, and the first few months can be of critical importance in laying the groundwork for future linguistic development. Our first concern must therefore be the way in which children acquire oral language and the circumstances that foster its development.

Oral language – a natural human function

Oral language can be considered a human biological function. Practically all human beings learn to speak unless they are neurologically damaged or completely isolated from other people; and they do so without much difficulty, regardless of their intelligence level or social background. In fact, in view of the complexity of the process involved, oral language, and an understanding of its uses, develops remarkably quickly. As Gordon Wells demonstrated in the Bristol Study of Language Development, by the time children go to school, they have learned an enormous amount about communicating through oral language. Charting the course of language development in a group of children from the age of fifteen months until they were over ten years old, the Bristol study found that by the age of five or six, almost every child had mastered the basic meanings and grammar of the language of the community and was using language for a variety of purposes in his or her interactions with other people.

Not everyone, however, ends up speaking equally well. Some people have a far higher level of oral language skills than others. Heredity is partly responsible for these differences, but environmental factors must also be taken into account. One must, for example, recognize the importance of emotional and physical well-being in supporting language acquisition and development, as well as the influence of the social interactions that are experienced from a very early age.

A crucial element in the development of speech is the social communication that naturally occurs among human beings, and in particular the social interaction that takes place between infants and their parents. As the research of Jerome Bruner and his associates at Oxford University demonstrated, babies are social beings from day one, expressing a range of emotions and responding to their parents' voices and presence with eye movements, vocal sounds, and various forms of body language. These sounds and movements have a purpose: they are infants' first attempts to form connections with the world around them.

The uses of oral language

Such efforts become much more sharply focused as children begin to acquire language skills. Children *want* to learn to speak. In the first place, speech enables them to communicate much more effectively than before. By verbalizing their thoughts and feelings, young children can establish meaningful relationships with their parents and siblings and become more completely a member of their family. In doing so, they achieve a clearer sense of who they are. But the chief function (and advantage) of speech is clarification rather than communication. Oral language provides us with a means of structuring and organizing the complexity and variety of life; we use it to sort things out in our minds. So, as their language skills develop, children use speech to think through their responses to the situations and experiences they encounter. Speech is thus an essential part of their learning to understand the world.

These are powerful motives. Children have a strong and instinctive desire to speak. In the vast majority of cases, conversations between young children and adults are initiated by the children themselves. Moreover, children's linguistic abilities do not depend solely, or even mainly, on how well they can reproduce what they have already heard others say. Children do learn words and phrases by hearing other people say them, but far more important for the development of their linguistic abilities is the creation of an environment in which their intent to speak is actively encouraged. For, as Dan Slobin and Charles Welsh concluded from a study they carried out in California, the intent to speak mobilizes latent abilities that would otherwise remain dormant.

Language development beyond imitation

Although their research focused on the role of imitation in a child's language development, Slobin and Welsh found patterns of speech development that had nothing to do with children's imitative abilities. They discovered that the children in their study were able to generate far more complex language than they could produce through imitation. Their interpretation of these findings was that children have innate capabilities which can be triggered by their desire to express thoughts or feelings that are important to them. Thus, responding positively to children's desire to speak and to understand provides a vital impetus to their linguistic development.

The findings of Slobin and Welsh have far-reaching implications, for they do not apply only to young children who are learning to speak. The same process is at work in persons of any age – witness the fact that even highly articulate adults often surprise themselves with their ability to express, when required, complex arguments that hitherto had been only vaguely formed in their minds. (The little girl who once said "How do I know what I think till I hear what I say?" neatly summed up this phenomenon.) The intent to speak needs therefore to be encouraged and channelled at all levels of the school system as well as in adult education classes. And the

intent will not exist unless learners appreciate the relevance and importance of what they learn and feel personally involved in the ideas and opinions they seek to express.

Nor does the triggering of capabilities by the desire for self-expression affect only the development of oral language skills. As we have seen, speech is the basis of all language activity. Thus, the intent to speak must also be seen as a key element in the acquisition and development of literacy skills. The research conducted by Gordon Wells in the Bristol study referred to earlier confirms this connection. A significant finding of this study was that the quality of the oral language with which children are surrounded has a considerable impact on their learning development. Not only does it influence the rate of their language development, it is also an important predictor of their achievement in school.

Stressing the importance of the quality of language that children experience means that parents and other adults should talk with and listen to children in a caring and natural way. What adults say should also be authentic – that is, it should represent how they really feel. This is far more important than the intellectual level of discussion that takes place or the range of subjects discussed. The expression of genuine feelings, and respect for the feelings of others, will encourage children to become more involved in the social life of their family and community through expressive and purposeful language.

Creating the intent to read

The indications are that learning to read is best achieved when it most resembles learning to speak. But, unlike speech, reading does not come naturally; it is not an accomplishment for which children instinctively strive. The intent to read must therefore be created through example and encouragement. Children need to see that reading and writing are important, desirable, enjoyable activities. It is important for them to be with people who like to read and write, for whom literacy is an integral part of their way of life. If they are exposed to the uses and enjoyment of literacy in everyday life, children will come to appreciate the benefits that literacy confers.

It is important to realize that children should be shown the way to literacy and not be unduly pressured to acquire reading skills. Over-anxiety about a child's ability or desire to read can lead to attempts to teach reading too soon or too mechanically, emphasizing the sounding out of words at the expense of spontaneity, enjoyment, and real understanding. Such an approach is often counter-productive because it can kill any intent to read that may have existed. It can also result in a preoccupation with right or wrong answers, which can be equally damaging to a child's interest in reading. Children will not get everything right the first time.

Learning to read involves a lengthy process of trial and error in which children need to feel comfortable about taking risks. Their performance will not improve if they are constrained by the fear of making mistakes.

On the other hand, it is absolutely vital to read to children on a regular basis and talk about books and stories with them. Nearly all children enjoy being read to and discussing the stories they hear, and hence these are desirable activities in themselves. But this should not obscure the fact that reading to children has a significant effect on their imaginative and intellectual development. Through listening to stories and talking about them, children learn to comprehend contexts that exist outside their own personal experience and begin to grasp the concept of narrative structure, the way a series of events can be connected in a logical order. This learning is similar to the process by which children come to master what is called "the technology of the book" – that is, understand what books are for and how to find their way around them. What happens in both cases is that children become more receptive to the idea of written language, how it is organized and what it can do for them.

The findings of the Bristol Study of Language Development indicate that receptivity to written language is closely linked to the development of literacy skills. In examining the factors affecting success in the early years of schooling, it was found that the most important predictor of achievement at the age of seven years was children's knowledge of what books are for and how they are used. This knowledge, in turn, was strongly predicted by the extent to which parents encouraged children to read and write and, in particular, by the frequency with which they read stories to their children.

Challenging the imagination

The extent to which books and reading are considered important in the home is an extremely influential factor in a child's literacy development. But the home is not the only environment that children experience and by which they are influenced. They also participate in the life of the wider community by attending functions of cultural, religious, sports, and social organizations. These organizations represent an altogether larger world than that encompassed by the home and can be quite overwhelming to a young child in the richness and diversity of their cultural and historical associations. They also introduce children to forms of language and vocabulary that initially are beyond their comprehension and that challenge their powers of interpretation. Learning the significance of these activities and the language associated with them is part of the process by which children become full-fledged members of society.

If children are to become literate in the complete sense of the word, the books they read and the stories they are told should, at least in part, offer a similar challenge. But, at the same time, particular books should not be prescribed merely because, from an adult standpoint, children *ought* to read them. Rather, children should be free to explore books for themselves and concentrate on those that interest them, since those are the books that will create and maintain their desire to read. Children will not necessarily choose books that they can understand without difficulty, but they should not be discouraged from attempting to read something simply because it is considered too difficult for someone of their age. It is also worth remembering that with most children aural comprehension of stories far outstrips their ability to read.

Moreover, total comprehension is not always attainable, or even a primary goal. People read not just for information and knowledge but also for their emotional and psychological health and development. Certain kinds of imaginative writing (poetry, in particular) are especially important in this context. Poetry is generally less concerned with objective meaning than with the linguistic possibilities of emotional expression and the interplay of insight and imagination. The reader's, or listener's, immediate and also most profound response is to the quality of the language and imagery and the moods they convey. Reading and listening to poetry can give children a greater sense of the richness and flexibility of language than any other linguistic activity and can provide a vital stimulus to their imaginative and emotional development. It is an experience that must not be trivialized – there must be a focus on poetry of recognized merit – or presented as a non-essential diversion from "real learning".

Literacy – the cognitive amplifier

Underpinning this discussion of literacy development is a view of literacy that goes far beyond the ability to read and write. Having the skills to obtain meaning from the printed word is, of course, an intrinsic part of being literate. But to see literacy as nothing more than that is to ignore what literacy really does for us.

Oral language, as we have seen, helps us to sort out our experiences. We talk things through with ourselves in order to clarify our thinking. Written language enables us to engage in critical thinking in a much more comprehensive way. This is because, unlike speech, written language lasts in time. It becomes part of a permanent record that can be referred to, reconsidered, and discussed with others. Talking about texts is the most important factor in developing critical thinking; it changes our perspectives and enlarges our understanding. And the critical thinking associated with written language is even more concentrated when the text is one that we have written (or are writing) ourselves. The act of writing clarifies our thoughts, and to read

what we have just written enables us to stand back and analyse these thoughts in a dispassionate and critical manner. It is the permanent nature of text that is the basis of its power, and being able to interact with text gives additional power (like a cognitive amplifier) to our thinking abilities.

To define literacy as merely the ability to read and write words on the page, or the ability to do so with the proficiency expected at a certain grade level, is to reduce literacy to a mechanical skill that can be mastered through repetition of basic drills. If learning to read and write is approached in this way, it loses its value as an exploration in understanding and self-expression. To read without understanding and to write without being able to express one's thoughts or feelings are virtually meaningless accomplishments and provide a poor foundation for further learning. Indeed, they may well militate against it; for to rob language of its meaning is to take away its relevance and curtail its possibilities.

A definition proposed by Gordon Wells provides a much broader account of literacy and of the way its various elements are related. According to Wells, literacy involves a *disposition* to refer to written language. People who are literate, in the full sense of the word, turn naturally and habitually to printed matter in the course of their daily lives. They also understand that different types of text need to be approached in different ways. Some, such as newspaper articles or shopping lists, are to be scanned quickly; others, such as technical manuals, need to be studied with particular objectives in mind. Works of fiction or poetry call for yet another kind of response. In all sorts of ways, literate people use texts to get things done – to meet practical, emotional, or intellectual needs.

Literacy can provide an added dimension to the way we think about what we know and what we have experienced. It instils the habit of reflection and critical evaluation. By giving us access to a formal body of knowledge which becomes part of our intellectual frame of reference, literacy enables us to assess the information we receive and to deal with the situations we encounter with greater insight and self-confidence. Literacy thus helps us to change our perceptions of the world and the role we can play in it.

Section II

Children's Literacy Partnerships: Ideas and Proposals

Small-group discussions were held at each meeting to enable participants to exchange ideas on literacy development in children, share information on literacy projects in which they were involved, and propose areas of co-operation that could be investigated. The ideas and proposals generated in these discussions were then presented to the meeting by a designated reporter for each group.

This section of the report contains a summary of the ideas put forward at all the meetings and a listing of the proposals made. These have been organized on the basis of five major themes which emerged as the project progressed.

Many of the proposals were presented in various forms by more than one group and at more than one meeting, and where this occurred, the different versions have generally been combined into a single item in this report. At the same time, an attempt has been made to convey the range of possibilities considered in any one area of concern and the extent to which a particular issue was viewed from a variety of perspectives.

It should be noted that some proposals refer to initiatives that have already been implemented in many areas of the province.

1. Promoting Literacy in the Community

Promotion of literacy and of the programs that support its development should be a major concern of all communities. It is essential to increase public awareness of literacy issues and create a positive image of literacy as being of vital importance to the whole community. This can best be achieved through an emphasis on literacy in all sectors of society, supported by continual literacy promotion by schools, community organizations, government agencies, businesses, and the media.

For such promotion to be effective, literacy programs and issues concerning literacy development must be presented in a positive light. Public identification of groups who are most at risk tends to reinforce the stigma of not being literate and thus discourages members of these groups from participating in literacy programs and activities. Instead, literacy promotion should stress the advantages to be gained from being literate: the opening up of educational and career opportunities, the enrichment of one's personal experience, and the ability to participate more fully in the life of the community.

This approach entails a commitment to a broad, inclusive definition of literacy which embraces more than just the attainment of a certain level of ability in reading and writing. Consistent with such a definition is the perception of literacy development as a lifelong process which does not end with a person's formal education.

Attitudes regarding the circumstances that foster literacy should also be addressed. Where children's literacy is concerned, schools are rightly seen as playing a major role; but the contribution of parents and the home environment should also be emphasized. There could, for example, be greater public awareness of the relationship between literacy development and early learning in the home, as well as of the need for continuing parental involvement in children's learning after they go to school.

Similarly, the importance of community involvement and its contribution to literacy development should be recognized. Community organizations and events that support literacy should be promoted, and community members could be featured as role models in literacy promotion, to encourage non-readers to acquire and develop literacy skills.

Promotion of literacy – a shared responsibility

Clearly, schools and educators have a central role to play in promoting positive attitudes towards literacy; after all, the development of literacy skills is one of their major functions. School libraries, for example, represent a considerable resource for the

promotion of literacy among students and their families. Literacy events, such as young authors' conferences, that are organized by schools to celebrate the achievements of their students, present opportunities for creating an interest in literacy in the wider community. There is also a growing movement for educators to inform parents and other adults in the community about the ways in which literacy development is being stimulated and encouraged in schools. Many adults find it hard to reconcile current teaching practices with their own experiences in learning to read and write.

But schools cannot be expected to act alone. Responsibility for the promotion of children's literacy should be shared by all institutions and agencies concerned with the welfare of the community, because children's literacy is a social issue of central importance to the community as a whole. Public libraries across the province have established a number of programs to promote literacy in the home, and these could be expanded and introduced in communities where they do not already exist. Community workers in health and social service agencies could become more aware of literacy issues and could talk to parents about their influence on their children's literacy development. Employers could contribute to children's literacy by promoting literacy in the work force as well as by supporting literacy activities in the community. All members of the community, in fact, should recognize that they have a stake in promoting children's literacy, because the future of society rests in their children's hands.

The role of the media

In discussing how this message could best be conveyed to the community at large, there was widespread agreement among participants that there was not enough use of local media (such as newspapers, television, and radio) to promote children's literacy and the programs that support it. It was felt that media campaigns were a very effective means of increasing public awareness of the need to create a truly literate society and of publicizing the achievements that had already been made.

The media could also promote children's literacy through their regular programming and content, though some doubts were expressed about the ability of television to do this. Insofar as it demands a passive response from viewers, television could be said to contribute to lower literacy levels, and some participants suggested that a "Shut off the TV" campaign would be salutary. At the same time, however, it was recognized that television has great potential for promoting the concept of literacy in homes where little reading takes place. In fact, in spite of some reservations about the nature of the medium, participants generally acknowledged that television could be a powerful means of bringing the issue of children's literacy to public attention and keeping it there.

Proposals

1.1 Communities could set up literacy advocacy groups to articulate their commitment to literacy and to co-ordinate the promotion of literacy at the local level.

1.2 Schools could act as a focus for community awareness of literacy issues by organizing discussion groups, inviting guest speakers, showing videos, and distributing newsletters to parents and those involved in community literacy programs.

1.3 To promote understanding of what literacy entails, a definition of literacy in its widest sense could be disseminated among parents and the community at large. School boards could seek the co-operation of the media and the business community in mounting such an awareness campaign.

1.4 In the larger school board areas there could be one or more individuals with full-time responsibility for promoting literacy among families. Particular emphasis could be given to explaining the importance of early literacy development and how it can be fostered and providing information on literacy programs and resources available in the community.

1.5 The Ministries of Education, Health, Community and Social Services, and Culture and Communications could help to give literacy a higher profile by jointly producing a promotional package on literacy for distribution by government offices throughout the province. They could also jointly and/or separately advertise in local newspapers drawing attention to the importance of literacy to the welfare of the communities concerned and the province as a whole.

1.6 Links could be established between literacy and a wide range of activities beyond the context of formal education. Members of the professions, politicians, business people, scientists, sports figures, etc. could be invited to speak in schools or community centres on the importance of literacy in their work.

1.7 Doctors and dentists could be encouraged to maintain a selection of good children's books in their waiting rooms. School boards and/or public libraries could provide these professionals with information on literacy development and advise them as to suitable reading material for various age groups.

1.8 The Ministry of Education and/or school boards could help MPs and MPPs to promote literacy in their constituency newsletters by providing information on literacy development and the literacy programs and resources available in their ridings.

1.9 Poster campaigns could promote literacy using a consistent theme or slogan (e.g., "Say 'Yes' to Literacy", or "Have You Read to Your Child Today?") and featuring "local heroes" as role models. The posters could be displayed in local stores, health clinics, community centres, bus shelters, etc.

1.10 A public awareness campaign, involving literacy agencies, the media, and local businesses, could publicize ways in which a higher level of literacy would benefit the community (socially, economically, and culturally) in the long term. Such a campaign would also help to convince local government and businesses that they have a stake in supporting literacy programs in the community.

1.11 Prominent members of the community – in local government, business, professional sports, the arts, the media, etc. – could be asked to participate as role models and publicists in literacy campaigns in the media.

1.12 Public and school librarians could stimulate an interest in literacy in the community by reviewing new books and other literacy materials and advertising the best of these in libraries or local bookstores.

1.13 Adult basic literacy programs present a good opportunity to promote the importance of children's literacy among parents who are themselves learning to read. Information about programs and materials for children could be made available to parents in adult literacy classes.

1.14 Children could be encouraged to promote their favourite books by creating posters, writing reviews or notices for the school bulletin board, or producing a "Book of the Month" feature which could be published in the school or community newspaper.

1.15 All community newspapers could include a children's page containing stories and poems written by children and reviews of children's books. Awards could be given for outstanding contributions, and competitions could be held from time to time. The inclusion of a children's page as a regular feature could be made possible by funding from local businesses.

1.16 Local media could produce literacy kits for parents, explaining how the media support children's literacy and emphasizing the media's commitment to full literacy in the community. The kit could be produced in collaboration with community groups and agencies concerned with literacy.

1.17 Promotion of literacy should not be confined to literacy in English or French. Parents who speak a language other than English or French as their mother tongue should be informed of the importance of reading or telling stories to their children in that language. They also need to know where they can obtain children's books in

their first language. Media serving particular ethnocultural groups in the community could play a key role in providing this information.

1.18 Local radio stations could promote literacy among their listeners by making the reading of a bedtime story part of their regular programming. Story readings could be aired at two different times, one for young listeners, the other for adults.

1.19 Libraries could promote literature for both children and adults by presenting book talks and story readings on the community channel of cable TV networks.

2. Bringing the School and the Community Together

Literacy development is a major goal of the school curriculum, but it cannot be exclusively the responsibility of the school. This is readily apparent from the fact that children spend approximately 185 days of the year in school and the remaining 180 at home and in the community. Much of children's learning thus necessarily takes place outside the school. If this learning is to include literacy development, parents, other members of the family, and community organizations and agencies must become involved in literacy activities and programs for children.

At the same time, parental and community involvement in literacy should be co-ordinated with the literacy development that takes place in the school. Since much of the expertise on children's literacy resides with the educational profession, school boards and schools need to share this knowledge with parents and other community organizations. It is in partnership with schools that parents and the community contribute most effectively to children's literacy.

For such partnerships to succeed, there must be good communication and close ties between schools and the communities they serve. Schools could articulate their objectives concerning literacy more clearly and create a better understanding of how these objectives could be achieved. Many parents and other members of the community need to be better informed about new learning approaches being implemented in schools and how these relate to literacy goals. They should also be encouraged to participate in school literacy activities — for instance, reading to or with children or accompanying class visits to the public library.

The benefits of personal contacts

Regular contact between teachers and parents is needed if parental support and involvement are to be a reality. One way of bringing teachers and parents together is through their representation on home-and-school committees. Home visits by Junior Kindergarten

teachers also offer opportunities for educating parents about their children's literacy needs and providing information about how these needs can be met. Such personal contact benefits teachers, too, since it gives them greater insight into their students' family and community backgrounds and how these might affect the children's learning in school. In these ways, both parents and teachers gain greater understanding of, and respect for, each other's roles. Ideally, a positive, encouraging relationship should already exist between parents and teachers by the time the children enter into school. Such a relationship is especially important for parents who, as a result of their own educational background, might not otherwise be comfortable in their dealings with the school.

The role of the school in the community

Closer co-operation between schools and community organizations can be achieved through regular consultation and the sharing of resources on a community, or even neighbourhood, basis. In some agencies (public libraries, in particular), children's literacy is already an established part of the programming; in others, the potential for supporting children's literacy has yet to be realized. By promoting themselves as a resource for both ideas and materials, schools can help to ensure that children's literacy becomes a focus in a wide variety of community activities. In turn, community organizations such as health and social service agencies, day-care centres, and religious and cultural groups can help schools to become better informed about social and health factors that might affect children's performance in school.

The role of schools within their communities could change if school facilities and resources were more accessible to the community at large. For instance, placing adult and family literacy programs in the school, and extending the use of the school library, could encourage teachers and students to participate in such programs as part of the regular school curriculum. The school building could, in fact, become a community resource centre — the focal point for the activities of a wide range of community organizations and agencies.

As important as bringing the school and the community together is the emphasis schools give to literacy beyond the context of academic studies and their sensitivity to factors that affect literacy development outside the school. Efforts to foster literacy partnerships with parents and community groups, through literacy programs such as the Borrow-a-Book program, need teacher commitment if they are to work with families in which the parents do not read. Making reading for enjoyment a regular part of the school program encourages children to read at home. Class visits or guest appearances help make children aware of other settings besides the school in which literacy is of central importance.

Proposals

2.1 Communication between educators and parents on the subject of children's literacy could be increased in the following ways:

a. The director of education of each school board (or his or her designate) could send a letter to all parents of newborns containing information on literacy acquisition and development in the years before the child goes to school.

b. Schools could send parents a regular newsletter about literacy activities in school and school/student involvement in community literacy programs. Parents, students, and other community members could be invited to contribute to the newsletter so that literacy would be perceived as a continuing priority in the community.

2.2 It is important for parents to remain actively involved in their children's literacy development after the children have started school. Parent-child reading and writing workshops could be jointly organized by schools and home-and-school committees to support such parental involvement.

2.3 Teachers could work with parents in setting up a home reading program. Such a program could include a regular story time or reading time involving all members of the family.

2.4 Schools, in collaboration with public libraries, could help parents to set up literacy awareness and support groups.

2.5 Literacy partnerships between schools and community groups need to be expanded. This expansion could be facilitated through the creation of a school-community organization responsible for disseminating information and co-ordinating initiatives.

2.6 Family literacy classes could be held in elementary schools. Time could be set aside for parents to take part in reading and writing activities with their children. Having parents learn with their children could help to demystify, for parents, the process of learning to read and write and could encourage the whole family to adopt a positive attitude towards literacy.

2.7 School facilities could be made available for language and reading programs offered by other community organizations and agencies. For example, community reading circles could be held in the school library or gym.

2.8 All public and school libraries could set up an interlibrary loan system so that there is a greater variety of print and other literacy materials available to students in schools.

2.9 There could be closer links between schools and the day-care centres in their neighbourhoods.

2.10 Teachers and school board consultants could be invited to talk to parents in prenatal programs about the importance of engaging in literacy activities with their new child at a very early age.

2.11 Schools could collaborate with community recreation departments to create more opportunities for community recreational programs based on literature and the arts and to enable children to have their own works performed in parks or other community recreational facilities.

2.12 Parents and senior citizens could be recruited as volunteers to work in school libraries.

2.13 Schools and community literacy groups could investigate ways of extending the use of school library resources outside school hours.

2.14 Joint public and school libraries could be set up at the same location to allow for longer and more flexible opening hours and to make a greater variety of books and other literacy materials available to students and adults.

2.15 There could be more contact between child-care centres located in schools and the school staff.

2.16 Community centres could be set up within schools, where space exists, so that schools become better integrated into the community. This arrangement would encourage parental involvement in school programs and make parents feel more comfortable in their dealings with the school.

2.17 The teacher's role as a caregiver, nurturing children's literacy development, needs to be emphasized, especially in the primary grades. Having teachers work with the same class for two or more years could help them to fulfil this role more effectively.

2.18 There should be a silent reading period in school every day for all students and staff to develop the habit of reading for enjoyment among children and adults. If such a habit were established in school, it could lead to regular reading in the home by children and their parents.

2.19 Schools could encourage an interest in reading and storytelling among their students by organizing literacy events – e.g., readings by local authors, sessions with storytellers, or appearances by "celebrity readers" such as local politicians and business people and media and sports personalities.

2.20 Parenting could be a mandatory credit course in secondary schools. Students need some formal preparation for their future role as parents. Such parenting courses could include a discussion of literacy issues – how language develops in young children, how literacy is acquired, how parents should communicate with and listen to children, the effects of television on young children, and

how children can be encouraged to be selective in their TV viewing. The relationship between literacy development and health and nutrition should also stressed.

2.21 Parenting programs could be introduced in schools in or before Grade 9. The proportion of students leaving school increases significantly after this level, and many of these students become parents at an early age.

2.22 The Ministry of Education could legitimize the study of children's literature and acknowledge the value of teenagers' reading to young children by establishing a credit course based on these activities.

2.23 Babysitting courses could include a focus on literacy development in young children. Students could, for instance, learn the importance of reading stories and talking about them with the children in their care.

2.24 Older students could be given experience in reading to younger children so that they feel comfortable in reading to younger siblings at home. Students' involvement with child-care centres in schools could be one means of providing such experience.

2.25 Co-operative education students who are placed in day-care centres, nursery schools, or elementary schools could act as good reading models for young children by sharing books with them and reading to them.

3. Providing Community Support for Children's Literacy

Children's literacy is a social as well as an educational concern and one on which the resources of the community as a whole should be brought to bear. Schools and libraries are normally considered to be the two institutions most closely connected with literacy development, but there are many other organizations and agencies in the community which could be approached for support or whose activities and programs could offer opportunities for children to acquire and develop literacy skills. These other partners in literacy include:

- athletic and sports clubs
- community literacy councils or coalitions
- community recreation departments
- cultural and religious organizations
- day-care centres

- health and social service agencies
- local businesses and unions
- local media
- Scouts, Guides, Beavers, etc.
- senior citizens' centres
- service clubs

This list is by no means complete, but it will serve to indicate the range of possibilities that exists. It should be emphasized that, whatever literacy partnerships are formed, their effectiveness will depend on the willingness of participants to share information and expertise and to work together to create an environment in which literacy development is recognized as being of vital importance to the welfare of the community.

In addition to these potential literacy partners, there is a particular group of individuals who have good reason to be directly concerned with young children's learning and development, and whose involvement in literacy partnerships is essential. These are the children's parents.

The importance of the home environment

Parents' attitudes are of fundamental importance in creating the right atmosphere for literacy development in the home. This atmosphere should be receptive to children's natural curiosity. Parents should encourage young children to explore their home environment and should involve them in household activities, explaining the significance of what they are doing. New experiences provide a valuable stimulus to children's imaginative and intellectual development. Even television, which is often used as a babysitter, can become an instrument of active learning if parents watch with their children and answer their questions about what they see.

At the same time, children need a sense of stability in the home, a comfortable atmosphere in which they are not afraid to learn. Parents can cultivate such an atmosphere by establishing regular patterns in the family's home life which children find predictable and reassuring. There could, for example, be times set aside during the day for reading or telling stories and for family members to discuss the events of the day and share their thoughts and experiences.

Because the home environment is a key factor in determining a child's early development, community support for children's literacy should involve support for parents in their role as the first and, in many ways, the most important teachers of their children.

Parents need to understand the importance of encouraging literacy development in children at an early age. They need to know how they can foster literacy in the home, what the community has to offer in the way of literacy programs and resources, and how they can participate in community literacy activities.

There are a number of occasions when such information could be conveyed. Pre- and postnatal classes, the time new mothers spend in hospital, home visits by community health and social service workers, and consultations with staff at public health units, all present opportunities for a discussion with parents on how early literacy activities contribute to the welfare of their children. Libraries and social service and health agencies could also help to organize parent support groups and hold on-site literacy workshops for parents who need assistance in guiding their children's literacy activities.

Community resources should also be brought to bear to ensure that literacy materials are available to those who need them. Not all families, for example, have easy access to a public library; residents of small, isolated communities may rely largely on outreach programs from regional libraries. Informal sharing arrangements, such as neighbourhood book exchanges, could be encouraged as a way of providing a range of materials to all families in the community.

Finally, children need books in the first language of their home. Ontario is a multilingual society, and this fact should be reflected in the range of literacy materials that is made available.

Parents in need of support

Community support is particularly important where the parents' background, abilities, or circumstances prevent them from participating fully in their children's literacy development. Some parents are themselves non-readers and are therefore unable to read to or share books with their children. Parents whose native language is not English may also feel themselves at a disadvantage when it comes to helping their children to become literate in English.

Although parents' educational and linguistic backgrounds may create certain advantages or disadvantages for children's literacy development, these factors are often less significant than is commonly supposed. For example, reading to children is extremely important, but parents who are not comfortable with reading can compensate for their lack of literacy skills by telling stories and nursery rhymes or by using pictures as a basis for storytelling. Nor does the fact that the first language of the home is neither English nor French necessarily impede children's ability to become literate in either of these two languages. If children have a firm foundation

in their parents' native tongue, there should be no adverse effect on their language development in English or French once they are old enough to participate in the life of the wider community.

Literacy and Native-language development

The situation can, however, be more complicated where Native families are concerned since their linguistic background is often not as secure as that of other ethnocultural groups. Historically, Native languages have been based on oral traditions and, until comparatively recently, they lacked written forms. As a result, there has been no standardization of Native languages through their written forms, and there is a great deal of dialect variation which would make such a process difficult. In addition, Native languages do not have the resources (readily available in languages such as English and French) that would support Native-language development. That is, they do not have a standardized writing system and they lack dictionaries, textbooks, and a variety of reading materials.

In addition, the pressures to speak English are strong, especially among Native people living in proximity to other Canadians in urban areas of southern Ontario. In fact, about 60 per cent of the Native population in Ontario now claims English as a first language. There are also a significant number of Native people who no longer speak their Native mother tongue at home with any frequency, but use English instead, and in some cases Native children have English as a first language, whereas their parents do not. Such circumstances make it more difficult for Native children to establish the linguistic base on which literacy is founded.

In the northern part of the province, Native languages are generally more firmly entrenched as the functioning languages of Native society. The Native language of the community is the first language in the home, and children learn it as their mother tongue. But their acquisition and development of literacy skills occur not in the Native language but in English, which is the general medium of instruction in school. The extent to which these Native children become literate depends largely on their ability to develop proficiency in English.

Added to these barriers to literacy is the lack of community support services and resources for many Native families that live in small isolated communities. Such communities have no library facilities and few, if any, Native-speaking teachers to encourage literacy activities among Native-speaking parents and their children.

The children most at risk

The social conditions experienced by children are a major factor in their literacy development. Many of the children who are most at risk come from low-income families that lack the security of a permanent home, do not have regular access to books and toys, and

may not be able to provide their children with an adequate diet. Single-parent families or those in which the parents are on welfare or unemployed are especially vulnerable and in need of assistance. Poverty, the break-up of the family, child abuse or neglect, and poor health can all present serious barriers to literacy development. Community health and social services have a vital role to play in identifying families where such barriers exist and helping parents to overcome them.

It is, however, precisely those children most at risk who are often the hardest to reach. Parents with serious financial or other personal problems cannot be expected to see their own involvement in children's literacy activities and programs as a high priority. And there can be a problem in getting non-reader parents (or those with a low level of literacy) to participate in such activities and programs because they may, understandably, be reluctant to reveal their own limitations and uneasy at the prospect of their children's surpassing them in ability. Individual contact (through home visits, for example) is the best way of encouraging such families to become involved, and family support groups that enable parents to share experiences can help them to overcome their fears and feelings of inadequacy.

Respecting parents as literacy partners

There can, however, be another obstacle to parental involvement. It must be recognized that parents can be discouraged from taking part in literacy programs if they are made to feel that they cannot initiate anything themselves — that they must rely on other people's expertise. There is thus good reason for parents to have a considerable say in running the programs that are designed to help them and their children.

If parents are to be regularly involved in community literacy programs, there also needs to be a flexible attitude on the part of community organizations towards the kind of commitment and contribution that parents can make. Parents vary widely in the way they view their responsibilities towards their children, in what they expect of their children, and in how much time they are prepared or able to devote to them. (This last consideration is especially important in view of the increasing number of single or divorced parents, and families in which both parents have full-time employment.) Easy access to programs and resources at convenient times and a supportive, non-threatening atmosphere are essential if parents are to participate and feel comfortable about doing so.

Community commitment

An emphasis on the role of the home and the need for parental involvement in literacy programs should not be seen as an attempt to place the responsibility for children's literacy development on parents alone. Other members of the community, such as business

people, senior citizens, health and social workers, day-care providers, and service and sports club organizers, could all develop a greater awareness of literacy issues and become more actively involved in working towards solutions. Local businesses, for example, could sponsor literacy activities involving students in elementary schools. Senior citizens and early retirees could volunteer their services in reading to and with children. Community organizations and clubs that run children's programs could make reading and storytelling a regular part of their activities.

Above all, there needs to be a commitment to children's literacy throughout the community and a clear understanding of what that commitment entails – namely, a co-operative effort by everyone concerned.

Proposals

3.1 Welcome Wagon programs could distribute literacy kits (containing details of programs and names of contacts) to new families in the community.

3.2 Home-and-school groups could train parents to act as volunteers in literacy activities in the community.

3.3 Pre- and postnatal classes could include sessions with a children's librarian who could provide information on children's books and literacy programs available through the public library. Classes could also visit the library and experience at first hand some of the literacy activities it offers, such as the story hour. Parents who are unfamiliar with the library's facilities could be shown how they can be used and what assistance the library staff can provide.

3.4 Non-reader parents may feel uncomfortable about visiting libraries and may be reluctant to use their facilities. There needs to be a means of introducing such parents to the library – for example, by holding a prenatal class (with a focus on literacy) at the library itself, or by showing a video about library facilities and activities.

3.5 Literacy kits could be provided to new mothers in hospital. The kits would include: a list of organizations and agencies that promote literacy in the community (with a contact name and phone number) and a description of the programs they offer; information about early literacy development and how it can be fostered in both the home and the wider community; a resource list of books, records, and tapes for both parents and their children; information from the public health unit on health issues that are relevant to literacy development; and a library card. Producing the kit could be a co-operative effort involving schools, libraries, and health agencies, and the kits could be distributed through public health units or by library staff during visits to the hospital.

3.6 Public health units and other health agencies could play a bigger role in supporting children's literacy development:

a. Public health nurses could consult with educators on literacy development in young children and include literacy as a topic of discussion when making home visits.

b. Staff at public health units could include literacy concerns as an additional topic of discussion during consultations with parents of young children. Parents need to know how children's physical and emotional health affects their learning development.

c. Children's books and information on literacy could be made available in doctors' offices.

d. When children are brought in for immunization and for health checks at Junior Kindergarten registration, public health unit staff could discuss with parents the importance of early literacy development and inform them about resources and programs available in the community.

e. There should be better liaison between public health units and agencies running children's literacy programs so that adverse health conditions (e.g., visual or hearing impairments, or problems with motor or communication ability) or learning disabilities that may affect literacy development can be identified at the earliest opportunity.

3.7 Children's basic physical health needs have to be met if they are to learn to the best of their ability. Breakfast programs in schools could help to ensure that children receive the nutrition they need before they start their studies for the day. The Ministry of Community and Social Services could provide funding for such programs.

3.8 Staff of social service and health agencies that deal directly with families could be trained in educating parents about children's literacy development.

3.9 Libraries (and other agencies concerned with literacy) need to adopt more effective channels of communication in order to reach non-reader parents. Sending out flyers or placing notices in community newspapers about facilities and programs is not sufficient; having volunteers and other parents make personal contacts is the best way of obtaining a positive response.

3.10 All Ontario government ministries should use clear, simple language when communicating with parents about education and health issues. The same applies to community organizations and agencies that send out material to client groups.

3.11 All organizations and schools should be encouraged to send out notices in the languages of the ethnic groups in the community.

3.12 TVOntario could produce videos for parents on language acquisition and reading development. These videos could emphasize the involvement of the whole family, (including the father, whose role is often overlooked). They could also focus on approaches to reading development in order to demystify the process of learning to read for parents who may be apprehensive about their involvement in their child's learning at school. The videos could be shown in schools and libraries or could be lent out to parents (e.g., by day-care centres), as well as being broadcast as part of TVOntario's regular programming.

3.13 Day-care centres could involve their children in literacy activities such as listening to stories and telling nursery rhymes. The centres need better access to books, and their staff need in-service sessions on literacy development. The Association of Early Childhood Education in Ontario could participate in assessing these day-care literacy needs.

3.14 Placing day-care facilities in schools and public libraries would give them better access to books and other literacy materials. The teacher-librarian or public librarian would then be available as a resource person to promote and guide literacy activities in the day-care centre.

3.15 Senior citizens and retirees could participate in literacy activities at day-care centres, public libraries, public health units, and schools. There could, for example, be more programs in which senior citizens act as reading partners for children in the years from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 6. Involvement of seniors in day-care activities would be facilitated if day-care centres were attached to senior citizen complexes.

Organizations and agencies involved in literacy programs could obtain senior volunteers through liaison with senior citizen programs. The Superannuated Teachers of Ontario could also help by soliciting volunteers from their membership.

3.16 Recreation Department programs for children could include literacy activities. For example, the adults or older students running the programs could spend some time reading to or sharing stories with the children in their charge.

3.17 Children could be encouraged to adopt a literacy partner for a whole year — someone with whom they could share their reading and writing. Grandparents and senior citizens would make suitable partners.

3.18 Day-care centres, libraries, and schools should encourage members of the community to volunteer their services as readers to children. Such volunteer readers could be drawn from all sectors of the community.

3.19 Community literacy groups could help residents of housing projects to set up reading circles in their neighbourhoods.

3.20 Scouts, Guides, Beavers, and other children's clubs could host literacy programs and include story reading and storytelling as regular activities at their meetings.

3.21 Public libraries need to become more like community resource centres so as to broaden their involvement in the community. Day-care facilities could be provided and outreach programs extended to encourage greater use of the libraries' resources.

3.22 Policies regarding fines for overdue books at public libraries could be reconsidered to encourage greater use of library books in homes.

3.23 Children's librarians could provide information and advice on literacy materials to community volunteers involved in children's literacy activities.

3.24 The lists of recommended books that public libraries prepare for parents of preschool children could also be distributed to day-care centres and public health units in all communities.

3.25 Public libraries could set up a young-authors section devoted to the writings of children in the community.

3.26 Community centres and literacy groups could take advantage of library book sales to obtain books at low cost.

3.27 Local authors could become more involved in community literacy programs through public readings of their work and appearances at libraries and bookstores. A writers-in-residence program could be set up in public libraries.

3.28 Children's literacy programs could be based in community resource centres that cater to a range of client groups. The centres could provide facilities such as a day-care centre, a toy library, and a children's book exchange, as well as offering adult literacy and English as a Second Language classes. Such an arrangement could encourage a family approach to literacy development.

3.29 There is a need for more neighbourhood drop-in centres, which could be staffed by community/parent volunteers, where parents and preschool children can take part in literacy activities. These drop-in centres could also co-ordinate exchanges of books and toys within the neighbourhood.

3.30 Museums, art galleries, and science and other cultural centres could provide a special writing room for children where they could write about what they experienced during their visit.

3.31 Community channels of cable TV networks could present a regular program of story readings (such as those that take place during library story hours) which could be taped for use in classrooms, day-care centres, community centres, etc. These videotapes could

also be lent out to parents. In this way, a larger percentage of children in the community could be exposed to story readings.

3.32 Native children have a rich resource in their people's stories, legends, dance, and music. TV programming that focused on these expressions of Native culture could be an effective way of supporting Native children's linguistic and cultural development.

3.33 The availability of children's literacy materials is a vital concern for small communities. If book- and toy-lending facilities were set up in general stores (much as video rentals are now), materials could become more accessible to children in these communities.

3.34 Quality children's books could be sold in grocery stores, where parents and children would see them regularly without having to make a special visit to a bookstore.

3.35 Neighbourhood book exchanges could be set up in which books no longer used in one home could be passed on to another family. The exchanges could be held in various homes on a rotating basis or take place in a neighbourhood school.

3.36 Toys could be shared as well as books. A toy-lending library could be set up in each community with contributions from parents whose children have outgrown their toys. Books and other literacy materials (such as tapes and records) could be included in the library's resources.

3.37 Parent support groups could be formed to help raise funds for literacy materials and programs and to organize the collection and donation of books and toys to day-care centres, literacy groups, and informal neighbourhood libraries.

3.38 Literacy programs could involve people from all ethnocultural groups in the community. Having popular children's books translated into several languages would provide a number of ethnocultural groups with a common fund of stories. If children from various ethnocultural groups were familiar with the same stories, it would be easier for them to share in story-reading activities. Books should be translated from English into other languages and from other languages into English. Ethnocultural associations could assist in recommending materials and providing translation services.

3.39 There is a need for Native stories and legends to be put down in writing and translated into other languages so that they can be circulated more widely in both Native and non-Native communities.

3.40 Religious organizations — especially those that sponsor immigrants from non-English-speaking backgrounds — could be encouraged to participate in community literacy programs. Literacy programs are an important means of helping immigrant families adapt to their new environment.

3.41 Television programs could be captioned so that children can see as well as hear what is spoken. This would be of particular benefit to children from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

3.42 Research is needed on ways to encourage literacy development in families where sign language is used.

3.43 Training in storytelling should be given to staff or volunteers who use sign language. Storytelling techniques in American Sign Language differ from those in spoken language.

3.44 There should be more links between adult basic literacy programs and children's literacy programs. Non-reader parents could be encouraged to participate in prereading activities with children, and as their literacy skills improve, they could act as volunteer readers to young children.

3.45 Native Friendship Centres and school boards could collaborate in setting up (with Ministry of Education funding) basic education classes for Native adults to help them acquire and develop literacy skills in English and/or Native languages. Such classes could offer secondary school credits.

3.46 Businesses should be encouraged to support children's literacy by providing funds for day-care facilities at the workplace and by allowing flexible working hours so that employees have time to take part in activities at their children's school or day-care.

3.47 Local businesses could support children's literacy activities in the community in the following ways:

a. They could sponsor a young-writers program that gives students the opportunity to read their work in public or have it published locally.

b. They could sponsor children's pages in community ethnic language newspapers. If sponsorship funds were provided, most newspapers would be prepared to publish writing in languages other than English.

c. They could present prizes for children's literacy achievements, such as reading a certain number of books in a given period.

3.48 Supermarkets and grocery stores could position aisle signs and shelf labels so that children as well as adults can read them.

3.49 Adult literacy education in the workplace can give parents the confidence and motivation to help their children become literate. The principles of the BEST (Basic Education for Skills Training) program, in which instruction is given by co-workers, could be applied in all types of institutions and workplaces; co-worker instructors may be more acceptable to adult learners than outside teachers.

4. Co-ordinating Literacy Programs and Initiatives

Issues concerning children's literacy cannot be effectively addressed in the province as a whole unless there is some form of overall co-ordination of programs and initiatives. Currently, no such co-ordination exists: there is no single provincial agency with responsibility for children's literacy. Several Ontario ministries are involved in children's literacy development, and there are a large number of literacy agencies, many of which are unaware of, or unfamiliar with, the others' programs and activities. Since there appears to be little sharing of information or co-ordination of programs among the ministries concerned (especially in the northern regions of the province), the onus is on local agencies to co-ordinate their efforts as best they can given the constraints of limited information and resources. This situation needs to be changed.

Formal mechanisms for literacy co-ordination

At the provincial level, some formal mechanism should be established to facilitate regular communication between ministries on children's literacy issues. Better interministry liaison could lead to a more co-ordinated approach in identifying priorities and addressing problem areas. It could also help to ensure that literacy agencies receive consistent support in terms of information and resources, and could increase the scope for co-operation among existing programs. The responsibilities for co-ordinating the literacy initiatives of provincial ministries could be vested in a provincial council on children's literacy, which would include representatives from all the ministries concerned.

In addition to a more co-ordinated approach at the provincial level, there is a need for greater collaboration among community agencies involved with children's literacy. Social service, health, educational, and other community agencies could increasingly integrate their efforts in supporting literacy acquisition and development. Ideally, an interagency network would evolve; resources could then be shared efficiently and information exchanged on a systematic basis. Children's social, psychological, and physical needs all have a direct bearing on the development of their language and literacy skills, and this fact should be reflected in the way communities organize the support services they provide.

The co-ordination of literacy programs and initiatives within the community could be supervised by a community literacy committee which would include representatives from all the agencies involved. Some communities might find it necessary to appoint a full- or part-time literacy co-ordinator with day-to-day responsibility for literacy support services and liaison with ministry

personnel. Community agencies could also benefit from the setting up of regional networks, which would permit communities to share resources and co-ordinate activities.

An integrated approach to children's issues

Co-ordination of programs supporting children's literacy development could ultimately have far-reaching effects on the way in which children's issues are addressed throughout the province. For literacy is only one of a number of child-related concerns (such as day-care, health, social welfare, and education) that need to be considered in connection with one another. Closer collaboration among agencies in dealing with one concern necessarily involves more co-operation in other areas as well. Where integration of child-related services is an objective, the traditional divisions of ministry responsibility (whether at the local or provincial level) can impede effective program development and delivery. A possible response would be to redraw the boundary lines and create a "Ministry of the Child" with responsibility for the whole spectrum of children's issues and concerns.

Proposals

4.1 There needs to be better communication and more co-operation between Ontario government ministries involved with children's literacy:

a. The Ministries of Education, Community and Social Services, Culture and Communications, Citizenship, Skills Development, and Health could jointly set up an advisory committee on children's literacy to ensure that regular and effective communication takes place among these ministries.

b. The Ministry of Education could collaborate with the Ministry of Health to provide medical personnel with information on children's literacy. Doctors and public health nurses need to be well informed about health aspects of literacy development and should be provided with materials that they can distribute in hospitals and clinics or during home visits.

c. The Ministries of Labour, Education, Culture and Communications, and Health could work together to determine ways in which industry and business could contribute to literacy development in the community.

d. The Ministries of Education, Citizenship, and Culture and Communications could co-ordinate services for non-native speakers of English, such as the translation of children's books and literacy information and the provision of interpreters at meetings concerned with literacy development.

4.2 There could be a co-ordinating council on children's literacy at the provincial level with representatives from government, community agencies, and the general public. This council would be responsible for disseminating information on literacy programs and events and on significant developments in literacy research; for co-ordinating the distribution of resources; and for facilitating co-operation among literacy agencies.

Information on literacy programs could be published by the council in the form of a literacy directory which would list relevant agencies and groups and describe their support services. The directory could also include a survey of effective models and strategies for program development and delivery. Distribution of such a directory would assist and encourage co-ordination of services.

4.3 Interministerial literacy committees could be set up in major communities and/or in geographic regions to co-ordinate family literacy programs and activities and to provide information services for local literacy agencies.

4.4 There should be regular meetings at the grass roots level to strengthen literacy partnerships and co-ordinate literacy programs and activities. Communities could formalize such meetings by setting up literacy committees with representatives from schools, libraries, local businesses, religious organizations, health and social service agencies, recreation and sports programs, etc., as well as parents in the community. A literacy co-ordinator could be appointed to organize meetings, gather information on existing programs, disseminate information about literacy (for example, as supplied by school boards), and approach funding sources. The co-ordinator could also be responsible for making provincial government ministries aware of the community's literacy needs.

4.5 Local community literacy directories could be used to promote and co-ordinate literacy programs. Such directories could list existing programs, agencies and individuals involved in organizing literacy activities, and people who could be called on to volunteer their services.

4.6 Schools could obtain the services of volunteer or part-time literacy co-ordinators to oversee the schools' involvement in community literacy programs, organize volunteer readers, and encourage parents to participate in literacy activities in the school.

4.7 Communities could establish an interagency referral system so that agencies concerned with health, social, and educational (including literacy) issues could inform each other about families and children who are at risk.

4.8 Community organizations and groups involved in literacy development could set up a system for exchanging personnel and resources.

4.9 Literacy programs could, where possible, be combined with other programs and activities for children. An important benefit would be that these other groups would then have access to literacy materials and information on literacy development.

4.10 Co-operation between public libraries and schools should be a continuing priority. Joint professional development days could be held for teachers and public librarians at which they could develop strategies for improving communication.

4.11 Schools, public libraries, and community literacy groups could collaborate in:

a. setting up a literacy speakers' bureau that could organize talks and discussion groups on various aspects of literacy;

b. organizing a team of volunteer readers to read to children in schools and libraries;

c. establishing a network of storytellers in the community who could participate in literacy programs and activities.

4.12 Community literacy agencies could establish closer links with publishers of children's books who could be encouraged to participate in literacy meetings and activities.

4.13 In view of the interrelatedness of children's issues, the Government of Ontario could consider the formation of a separate "Ministry of the Child", which would have overall responsibility for child-related issues and programs. The ministry could be supported by an advisory council that would include representatives from other ministries concerned with child welfare and development.

5. Planning and Implementing Literacy Programs

Literacy is an economic as well as a social issue. With the development of increasingly sophisticated technology and a growing emphasis on information-based industries, our society relies more than ever on the capabilities of a literate work force. By the time the young children of today seek employment, the demands for literacy skills in their widest sense will doubtless be even more persistent and widespread. Failure to invest sufficient funds now in programs and initiatives could cost our society dearly later on in terms of a lack of competitiveness in international markets and a consequent rise in unemployment.

Funding requirements

New literacy partnerships and programs cannot be established, or existing ones extended, without adequate funding. Setting up a program takes time and money, quite apart from the funds needed

to ensure consistent delivery once the program is in place. Yet there is often a problem at the community level in identifying where funding is available and how potential funding sources should be approached. These uncertainties can be major obstacles to the successful implementation of literacy programs.

Although financial support may be forthcoming from municipalities, local businesses, and service organizations, the provincial government remains the primary source of funding for literacy programs. Both the nature and extent of this funding, however, need to be reconsidered. For example, most community-based literacy agencies are dependent on grant funding and are not included as a regular item in ministry budgets. This makes it difficult for agencies to plan for consistent long-term program delivery.

Funding could also be channelled directly to community organizations and groups so that they can exercise effective control over their programs without being constrained by ministry directives for the use of funds. Such an arrangement would be consistent with the goal of encouraging communities to take literacy initiatives themselves, in response to local conditions. Location of leadership and responsibility at the community level should be a basic objective. At the same time, the provincial government should try to ensure, through its funding mechanisms, that wherever possible literacy agencies co-ordinate their activities and share information and resources.

Program assessment

But adequate funding is not the only requirement. Literacy programs also need careful, systematic planning and implementation. At the planning stage, for example, there needs to be an investigation, in consultation with client groups, into what programs are currently being provided, how well they meet the needs of client groups, and what new programs, if any, would meet these needs more effectively.

Access to programs and resources

Ensuring that client groups have access to literacy programs and resources is another priority. Access is generally more difficult for people living in rural communities than for those in urban centres. In some areas, especially in northern regions, the population is small and scattered, and distances from major urban centres are large. In isolated communities, the cost and availability of transportation and the time involved become major factors in determining whether families can participate in literacy programs or use library resources on a regular basis.

Providing funds for transportation could alleviate this problem to some extent. But often a better solution is to set up outreach

programs in the communities where they are most needed. More families could be involved if programs and resources were brought to local communities rather than being made available only in central locations. There should be a firm commitment on the part of all agencies and organizations involved in literacy development to reach the largest possible number of people in the most efficient way.

Proposals

5.1 All Ontario government ministries with a stake in literacy development could collaborate in committing funds for family literacy programs, for which community agencies could apply.

5.2 Ontario government ministries that fund community literacy programs should ensure that community agencies know which persons, in each ministry, are in charge of reviewing funding proposals.

5.3 Provincial support for family literacy programs could include, in addition to direct funding, assistance in setting up pilot projects and in co-ordinating the activities of the various agencies involved in literacy development.

5.4 The Ministry of Education could increase its funding for adult literacy programs and establish them as an integral part of adult education.

5.5 The province could set up and fund a provincial pool of personnel for multilingual services, such as translation of printed matter and interpretation at meetings. These costs are often beyond the means of small communities or boards of education.

5.6 Service clubs could be approached for funds to extend existing literacy programs and set up new ones.

5.7 Parent support groups could organize fundraising activities at the community level.

5.8 A model for program planning and implementation could be developed by an interministry advisory group for use by community organizations in starting up family literacy programs. Such a model could include information on how to write program proposals and how to apply for government funding.

5.9 Client groups should be invited to participate in the planning and implementation of literacy programs. Clients' views should be taken into account, and clients should be encouraged to play an active role in collaborating with literacy agencies and professionals in the field.

5.10 Access to a public library can be a problem for families living in small isolated communities. Closer links are needed between schools and public libraries so that the resources of the libraries could be made available through the schools.

5.11 There could be a greater emphasis on outreach programs in small communities. Basing programs in a central location in an area can discourage participation because of the costs of, and time involved in, transportation.

5.12 Funding could be available for transportation and, if necessary, child-care services in isolated communities for which outreach programs cannot be provided .

5.13 Participation in adult literacy programs would be encouraged in sparsely populated areas if such programs were, at least initially, organized for small local groups.

Section III

Survey of Existing Literacy Programs and Initiatives

This section by no means provides a complete listing of all the literacy programs and initiatives currently being undertaken in the province. Rather, it reflects the range of literacy activities in which participants at the regional meetings were involved. Many other projects were mentioned during these meetings in addition to those described here, but insufficient data were obtained to include them in this report.

For further information about literacy programs in Ontario, contact:

Ministry of Education
Literacy Branch
6th Floor, 625 Church Street
Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2E8

(416) 326-5400

FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMS

Action Read Family Literacy Program

A community-based, learner-centred basic literacy program developed by Action Read, a division of the Centre for Employable Workers, a non-profit charitable corporation. The program operates in a non-profit housing project, in a co-op housing project, and in partnership with the YM/YWCA Teenage Parents Program.

Each learner is matched with a volunteer tutor, and the tutor and learner together design an appropriate program and select materials. Tutor training is provided by Action Read staff.

Contact: *Lynda Lehman*
Family Literacy Program Co-ordinator
Action Read
Centre for Employable Workers
5 Douglas Street
Guelph, Ontario N1H 2S8

(519) 836-2759

Combined Adult Education/Preschool Program

Frontenac County Board of Education offers an adult basic education program with a built-in preschool program to encourage parent-child involvement in reading.

Contact: *Mary Forbes*
Frontenac Public School
30 Crowdy Street
Kingston, Ontario K7K 3V9

(613) 548-8384

Family Literacy Interest Group

A province-wide organization that has developed, in co-operation with other agencies, a variety of literacy programs to meet the needs of parents and their preschool children.

Contact: *Janet Shively*
Family Literacy Interest Group
c/o Frontenac-Lennox and Addington County
Roman Catholic Separate School Board
P.O. Box 1058
84 Stephen Street
Kingston, Ontario K7L 4Y5

(613) 544-4927

Family Literacy Project for Wawa

Organized and sponsored by an interagency Family Literacy Committee, this project encompasses a number of programs and activities. These include:

Family Literacy Awareness Week Proclaimed by the Michipicoten Township Council in 1990, this event involved schools, businesses, and the media and included special displays and other promotional activities. The purpose of the awareness week, which is expected to be an annual event, was to foster the idea that reading is a vital, lifelong skill and to heighten awareness in the community of family literacy and its importance to society.

Books for Babies A book gift program for all children born in the community. A package containing a book, a bookmark, and information flyers is distributed by the public health nurse during routine visits to newborns. The aim is to encourage parents to read to very young children and to provide information to parents about reading to their children and about the literacy support services that are available.

Bargain Book Bonanza A book recycling project in which books are sold to raise funds for other programs and activities of the Family Literacy Project.

Contact: *Lynne Zuliani*
Co-ordinator
Focus on Learning: Adult Basic Literacy
for North Algoma
9 Mackey Street
Box 1387
Wawa, Ontario P0S 1K0

(705) 856-4394

Family Reading Every Day (FRED)

A campaign to increase time spent in family reading activities. Includes posters, contests, prizes, buttons.

Contact: *Barbara Day*
Hastings-Prince Edward Roman Catholic Separate
School Board
3 Applewood Drive
Belleville, Ontario K8P 4E3

(613) 968-4270

Foster Farm Family Literacy Programs

Community-based literacy programs for various age groups, with a focus on whole-family involvement. Programs include one-on-one literacy instruction, after-school homework help, and adult literacy classes.

Contact: *Suzanne Aikin*
Community Co-ordinator
Foster Farm Tutoring and Homework Program
Unit No. 334, 1065 Ramsey Crescent
Ottawa, Ontario K2B 7Z9

(613) 726-1416 or (613) 239-2765

Lambton Home Study and Reading Program

A program for adult students and their children. Weekly home visits by the instructor combine study assistance for adults with a toy/book/tape-book lending service for the children. The instructor reads to the adults and their children from the book(s) being lent that week, and the adults are encouraged to reread the book(s) to their children before the next visit.

Contact: *Nancy Cates*
George Perry Adult Learning Centre
Lambton County Board of Education
660 Oakdale Avenue
Sarnia, Ontario N7V 2A9

(519) 336-1500

Literacy Alliance of North Bay

An organization that is developing a family literacy project at the West Ferris Neighbourhood Centre for adult basic education learners and their children.

The literacy alliance is also establishing a homework program at the centre for students in Grades 5-8, who work with peer helpers from local secondary schools. (These helpers participate in the program as part of a secondary school credit course.) It is hoped that, through their children's involvement in the homework program, parents will be encouraged to enrol in adult literacy classes.

Contact: *Suzanne Harris*
Literacy Alliance of North Bay
124 Main Street East
North Bay, Ontario P1B 2T5

(705) 476-8588

Literacy/ESL Resource Centre

A resource centre developed by the Sudbury Board of Education to make available family literacy materials – including books, puzzles, and games – for adults in literacy and English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classes to use with their children.

Contact: *Ellen Nelson*
Sudbury Board of Education
298 College Street
Sudbury, Ontario P3C 4V7

(705) 675-5481

London Adult Learners' Children's Centre

Operates preschool programs for children whose parents attend the Wheable Centre for Adult Education and the Empress Public School ESL Adult Program.

Contact: *Geri Doerr*
London Adult Learners' Children's Centre
70 Jacqueline Street
London , Ontario N5Z 3P7

(519) 434-8404

London Community Schools Association

Runs family literacy workshops for adult learners and parents.

Learner/Tutor Workshops A series of workshops held at the Wheable Centre for adult basic literacy learners who have young children, and their tutors. The focus is on the parent's role as the child's first teacher and on how children learn and develop literacy skills. Included is a session with a children's librarian on resources available in libraries. Parents may take home children's books from the centre's lending collection.

Fun with Books Workshops held in housing projects for parents and their young children. "Big books" are used to provide a model for parents in reading to their children. Children take part in other activities connected with the reading – e.g., songs, rhymes, and crafts. Separate sessions with parents focus on how children learn and how to choose books for children, and include a visit to a library.

Contact: *Bonnie Mahon*
London Community Schools Association
70 Jacqueline Street
London, Ontario N5Z 3P7

(519) 434-8404

Parents for Reading Program

A community-based family literacy pilot project co-ordinated through Confederation College, Thunder Bay, in collaboration with other organizations and agencies. Eight weekly sessions are held for parents and their preschool children. The program includes joint parent-child activities and provides child care while parents attend workshops on literacy learning and development.

Contact: *Kathleen Forneri*
Family Literacy Co-ordinator
Confederation College of
Applied Arts and Technology
P.O. Box 398
Thunder Bay, Ontario P7C 4W1

(807) 475-6318

Reading and Parenting Program (RAPP)

A family literacy program for parents with low literacy skills and their children. The program is designed to promote early reading in the home by parents and encourage parents to get involved in their children's literacy development. Workshops focus on how literacy develops and how parents can contribute to that development, and parents are shown simple activities by which they can foster literacy skills at home.

Contact: *Donna Stoness*
Family Literacy Co-ordinator
Kingston Literacy
Unit 204, Kingslake Plaza
1201 Division Street
Kingston, Ontario K7K 6X4

(613) 546-2462

Story Centre Project

A family literacy project managed by Kingston Literacy. The aims of the project are to make literacy kits and resource materials available from story centres located in preschool centres, kindergartens, and parent-tot groups; to increase parents' awareness of the importance of books in educating preschool children; and to assist early childhood educators to identify and support functionally illiterate parents. Each story centre consists of a cabinet housing approximately fifteen kits, which may be borrowed by families using the preschool program, as well as storybooks and resource materials for use by preschool staff.

Contact: *Debbit Nesbit-Munroe*
Co-ordinator, Story Centres
Kingston Literacy
Unit 204, Kingslake Plaza
1201 Division Street
Kingston, Ontario K7K 6X4

(613) 546-2462

Sudbury Community Literacy

An agency that organizes family literacy workshops, in collaboration with the Sudbury Board of Education, for parents, adult literacy learners, and literacy practitioners. It also promotes literacy awareness by creating family literacy displays and distributing literacy kits for young children and babies of adult literacy learners.

Contact: *Dee Goforth*
Co-ordinator
Sudbury Community Literacy
Third Floor
124 Cedar Street
Sudbury, Ontario P3E 1B4

(705) 671-1499

Timmins Learning Centre

Provides an adult literacy and ESL program with a preschool component to promote and encourage family literacy. One-on-one literacy tutoring is available. Tutors are volunteers trained at the centre.

Contact: *Rosemary Newman*
Timmins Learning Centre
150 Brousseau Avenue
Timmins, Ontario P4N 5Y4

(705) 268-8900

Wheable Centre for Adult Education

Family Literacy/Parenting Group For parents attending classes at the centre. Parents are encouraged to improve their reading skills and be good role models, as readers, for their children.

Contact: *Fay Mombourquette*
Wheable Centre for Adult Education
70 Jacqueline Street
London, Ontario N5Z 3P7

(519) 434-8404

Family Literacy Community Committee Plans intergenerational programs for non-reader or new-reader parents and their children. Included on this committee are early childhood educators, a school board consultant, community development workers, and representatives of adult literacy and basic education programs.

Contact: *Mary Oliver*
Wheable Centre for Adult Education
70 Jacqueline Street
London, Ontario N5Z 3P7

(519) 434-8404

HEALTH AND LITERACY PROGRAMS

Lawrence Heights Community Health Centre

Develops health/literacy projects in co-operation with schools and community groups. Projects include:

Easier to Read, Easier to be Hea[illegible]ject A co-ordinator from the centre works with community gr[illegible] residents in a housing project to develop models for producing clear-language health texts so that information on family and community health concerns can be made more accessible.

Contact: *Cathy Paul*
Lawrence Heights Community Health Centre
3 Replin Road
Toronto, Ontario M6A 2M8

(416) 787-1672

Kids in Action A project at Flemington Public School that allows children to articulate their ideas about healthy neighbourhoods and consider actions they could initiate to change their neighbourhood for the better.

Contact: *Vuyiswa Keyi*
Lawrence Heights Community Health Centre
3 Replin Road
Toronto, Ontario M6A 2M8

(416) 787-1671

Nobody's Perfect

A federal government initiative designed to help parents develop parenting skills and gain confidence in nurturing the health and safety, and guiding the behaviour and development, of their children. Public health nurses and/or community volunteers are trained to work with parents of young children (up to five years) — especially parents who are young; single; socially, culturally or geographically isolated; or limited in their education. Materials, published by Health and Welfare Canada, include a manual for the trained facilitators and a set of easy-to-read books for parents.

Contact: *Heather Ramsay*
Program Officer
Health Promotion Directorate
Health and Welfare Canada
605 - 2221 Yonge Street
Toronto, Ontario M4S 2B4

(416) 973-1805

Parents Helping Parents

A program that provides training for community volunteers of various ethnocultural backgrounds so that they can assist parents of young children from these ethnic communities in matters concerning their children's health and development.

Contact: *Dr. Bea Aschem*
Department of Public Health
7E, City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, Ontario M5H 2N2

(416) 392-7451

Plain-Language Health Pamphlets

The Department of Public Health in Toronto has rewritten many of its public information pamphlets in plain language at a Grade 3 or 4 level to make their contents more accessible to client groups.

Contact: *Ann Moon*
Office of the Medical Officer of Health
Department of Public Health
7E, City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, Ontario M5H 2N2

(416) 392-7407

MOTIVATIONAL READING PROGRAMS

Leading to Reading Club

A reading-practice and reading-for-enjoyment program for primary school children who are reading below their grade level. Volunteers meet with students one-on-one for an hour each week throughout the school year. The volunteer-student relationship is seen as a crucial component of the program.

Contact: *Susan Back*
Manager of Community and Information Services
North York Public Library
5120 Yonge Street
North York, Ontario M2N 5N9

(416) 395-5600

Parents as Reading Partners

Co-operative library-school programs designed to encourage parent-child reading in the home and provide a supportive home-school connection for children and their parents. Children choose library books to take home and read them to or with their parents on a regular basis. Progress is monitored by their teacher.

Contact: *Nora Elliott*
North Bay Public Library
271 Worthington Street East
North Bay, Ontario P1B 1H1

(705) 474-4830

Reading Encouragement Program

An individualized reading program offered by the St. Thomas Public Library in co-operation with schools. The program is designed for elementary students who read below their grade level or are reluctant to read. Staff of the library's children's department help students choose appropriate reading material.

Contact: *Julie Siegel*
St. Thomas Public Library
153 Curtis Street
St. Thomas, Ontario N5P 3Z7

(519) 631-6050

Reading Enjoyment and Development (READ)

A co-operative, community-based program that pairs children who are slow or reluctant readers with adult volunteers to improve the children's reading abilities and encourage them to read for pleasure.

Contact: *Ruth Napp*
Crouch Neighbourhood Resource Centre
550 Hamilton Road
London, Ontario N5Z 1S4

(519) 642-7630

Reading Rendezvous; Readers Are Leaders

Volunteer reading programs providing additional reading practice for primary school children.

Contact: *Carole Aitken*
Waverley Resource Library
285 Red River Road
Thunder Bay, Ontario P7B 1A9

(807) 344-3585

NATIVE LITERACY PROGRAMS

Literacy/Li'l Beavers Programs

Friendship Centre and Niin Sakaan literacy programs work in partnership with Li'l Beavers programs to promote literacy among Native children. Activities include films, read-a-thons, and book talks.

Contacts: *Sheila McMahon*
Literacy Co-ordinator
United Native Friendship Centre
301 Scott Street
PO Box 752
Fort Frances, Ontario P9A 1H1

(807) 274-3207

Florence Gray
Niin Sakaan Literacy Program
29 Wellington Street East
Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario P6A 5K9

(705) 256-5634

N.B. Literacy programs in partnership with the Li'l Beavers program are provided at over twenty Friendship Centres throughout the province.

Nokee Kwe Literacy Initiatives Project

Offers a learner-centred approach to literacy learning for Native women and youth, incorporating parenting and family literacy activities as part of a larger literacy program.

Contact: *Ellen Sands*
Program Director
Literacy Initiatives Project
Nokee Kwe Occupational Skill Development Inc.
304 York Street
London, Ontario N6B 1P8

(519) 667-7088

Northshore Native Literacy

Offers an afterschool program for Native children in which they carry out their homework assignments. Assistance with literacy and numeracy skills is provided by secondary school students and/or parent/adult literacy learner volunteers. The program also helps to identify children who are falling behind in their school work. Preschool children attend reading sessions in which they are read to by older students.

Contact: *Joanne Bissaillion*
Northshore Native Literacy
P.O. Box 1299
Blind River, Ontario P0R 1B0

(705) 356-1621

Unemployed Help Centre of Windsor (START Program)

One-on-one tutoring to school-age children offered through the volunteer services of the Personal Education for Natives (PEN) program.

Contact: *Joan K. Iatonna,*
Co-ordinator
Unemployed Help Centre of Windsor
706 Victoria Avenue
Windsor, Ontario N9A 4N2

(519) 667-7088

NEW-PARENT PROGRAMS

Books for Babies

A literacy package is delivered to each new baby's home, and the child receives the gift of a book on each subsequent birthday until he or she enters school.

Contact: *Jeanne Bryan*
Ignace School
The Dryden Board of Education
Box 64
Ignace, Ontario P0T 1T0

(807) 223-5311

Brampton Library/Peel Hospital Program

Parents of children born at Peel Memorial Hospital receive a children's book, a booklet entitled "Tips for Parents" containing suggestions for new parents on prereading and reading activities, and a library membership application form.

Contact: *Anne Fraser*
Brampton Public Library
65 Queen Street East
Brampton, Ontario L6W 3L6

(416) 453-2444

Elgin WTA Reading Package for New Parents

The Elgin Women Teachers' Association distributes reading packages to new parents. The kits are accompanied by a letter from the WTA and include a nursery rhyme book, a pamphlet entitled "Reading to Young Children" (prepared by the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario), and a brief questionnaire regarding the program's effectiveness. Teachers hope that giving the kits to new parents will make it more likely that the children will start school feeling comfortable with books and eager to begin reading for themselves.

Contact: *Nancy Chapple*
Scott Street Public School
50 Scott Street
St. Thomas, Ontario N5P 1K6

(519) 631-5020

OTHER PROGRAMS

Capital Region Centre for the Hearing Impaired (CRCHI)

Offers a primarily adult literacy program for deaf and hard-of-hearing people. Both group and one-on-one tutoring are available, and assistance can be obtained at the CRCHI reading room on a drop-in basis. The centre also has a summer program for deaf children and their siblings, and for hearing children with deaf parents. Tutors are volunteers, many of them sign language students, who go through a training program as well as attending workshops to improve their teaching skills. A literacy program newsletter is published six times a year.

Contact: *Louise Ford* or *Cheryl Wilson-Lum*
Capital Region Centre for the Hearing Impaired
314 Lisgar Street
Ottawa, Ontario K2P 0E3

Voice (613) 236-8391
TTD (613) 233-8390

Literacy in the Information Age

A national literacy project of the Canadian Home and School and Parent-Teacher Federation. The project's aims are to promote awareness of literacy requirements in the information age; mobilize school and community volunteers to advocate and deliver programs for prevention and remediation of illiteracy; and work in partnership with all sectors of the community to promote literacy through the formation of literacy exchanges.

Contact: *Maybelle Durkin*
National Project Director
Canadian Home and School and
Parent-Teacher Federation
323 Chapel Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7Z2

(613) 234-7292

Read Canada

A national children's literacy program with a comprehensive set of activities, including reading circles, readings by celebrities, book sharing, and promotion of parent reading.

Contact: *Philip Fernandez*
Frontier College
35 Jackes Avenue
Toronto, Ontario M4T 1E2

(416) 923-3591

Scatcherd Children's Centre

Operated by the London and District Association for the Mentally Retarded, offers a reading program for children aged two to six years.

Contact: *Colleen Pavlech*
Scatcherd Children's Centre
217 Sarnia Road
London, Ontario N6E 1N1

(519) 432-7184

Story Hours in City Day-Care Centres

A program co-ordinated by the Windsor Public Library and the City of Windsor Social Services. Children's librarians from the Windsor Public Library provide weekly story hours in city day-care centres.

Contact: *Callie Israel*
Co-ordinator
Adult and Children's Services
Windsor Public Library
850 Ouellette Avenue
Windsor, Ontario N9A 4M9

(519) 255-6754

PROVINCE-WIDE PROGRAMS IN LIBRARIES AND SCHOOLS

There are a number of literacy programs and activities that, in varying forms, are offered by libraries and schools across the province. Such programs were mentioned at all of the regional meetings. Details of programs available in particular communities can be obtained from local libraries and from schools or school boards.

Library Programs

Baby Time; Toddler Time; Tales for Twos; Time for Twos Programs introducing book-related experiences to children between one and three years. Activities include reading stories and nursery rhymes, games, finger play, and singing.

Preschool Storytime; Preschool Story Hour Story readings for children between 3 and 5 years.

Summer Reading Clubs Children are encouraged to keep up with their reading during the summer while they are not in school.

Reading Lists Libraries provide lists of recommended books for parents to read to their young children.

Class Visits Designed to familiarize students with library services and facilities and promote reading activities.

School Programs

Young Authors' Conferences Give children who have written their own books public recognition, and an opportunity to share their achievement with others.

Young Writer Publications Anthologies of children's writing published by school boards.

Young Readers' Conferences Provide opportunities for young readers to share their achievement with others.

Home Reading Programs Programs, such as "Borrow a Book", that enable children to borrow books from the school library and read them at home.

Book Fairs Books on display in schools for sale to parents.

Silent Sustained Reading Programs such as DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) and USSR (Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading) that provide a quiet period for reading in school.

Parent Nights Teachers meet with groups of parents to discuss literacy in the home.

Volunteers in Schools Parent, senior citizen, and student volunteers help children with their reading.

MS (Multiple Sclerosis) Read-a-thon Children raise money for multiple sclerosis by being sponsored to read books.